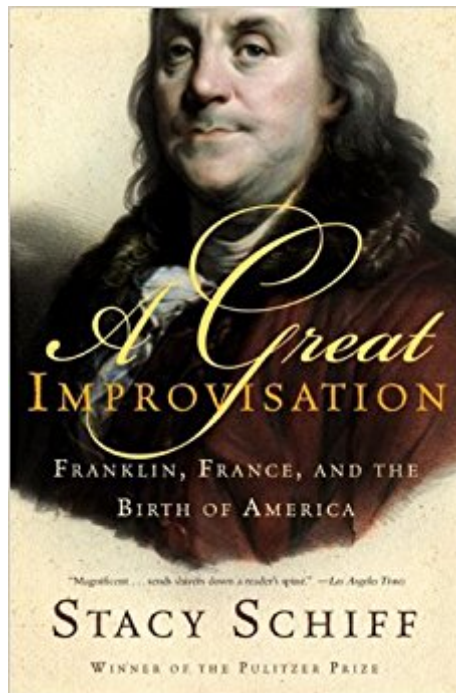




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# **A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, And The Birth Of America**



## Synopsis

In this dazzling work of history, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author follows Benjamin Franklin to France for the crowning achievement of his career."In December of 1776 a small boat delivered an old man to France." So begins an enthralling narrative account of how Benjamin Franklin--seventy years old, without any diplomatic training, and possessed of the most rudimentary French--convinced France, an absolute monarchy, to underwrite America's experiment in democracy. When Franklin stepped onto French soil, he well understood he was embarking on the greatest gamble of his career. By virtue of fame, charisma, and ingenuity, Franklin outmaneuvered British spies, French informers, and hostile colleagues; engineered the Franco-American alliance of 1778; and helped to negotiate the peace of 1783. The eight-year French mission stands not only as Franklin's most vital service to his country but as the most revealing of the man. In *A Great Improvisation*, Stacy Schiff draws from new and little-known sources to illuminate the least-explored part of Franklin's life. Here is an unfamiliar, unforgettable chapter of the Revolution, a rousing tale of American infighting, and the treacherous backroom dealings at Versailles that would propel George Washington from near decimation at Valley Forge to victory at Yorktown. From these pages emerges a particularly human and yet fiercely determined Founding Father, as well as a profound sense of how fragile, improvisational, and international was our country's bid for independence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Benjamin Franklin began the "the most taxing assignment of his life" at the age of 70: to secure the aid of the French monarchy in helping the fledgling United States establish their republic. The job

required tremendous skill, finesse, and discretion, and as Stacy Schiff makes clear in this brilliant book, Franklin was the ideal American, perhaps the only one, to take on the task, due in large part to his considerable personal prestige. One of the most famous men in the world when he landed in France in December 1776, his arrival caused a sensation--he was celebrated as a man of genius, a successor to Newton and Galileo, and treated as a great dignitary, even though the nation he represented was less than a year old and there were many doubts as to whether it would see its second birthday. Though he had no formal diplomatic training and spoke only rudimentary French, Franklin managed to engineer the Franco-American alliance of 1778 and the peace treaty of 1783, effectively inventing American foreign policy as he went along, in addition to serving as chief diplomat, banker, and director of American naval affairs. Franklin recognized and accepted the fact that French aid was crucial to American independence, but some Founding Fathers resented him for making America dependent on a foreign power and severely attacked him for securing the very aid that saved the cause. Schiff offers fascinating coverage of this American infighting, along with the complex political intrigue in France, complete with British spies and French double agents, secret negotiations and backroom deals. A Great Improvisation is an entertaining and illuminating portrait of Franklin's seven-year adventure in France that "stands not only as his greatest service to his country but the most revealing of the man." --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Numerous bestselling volumes have been written recently on the man one biography called "the first American." Pulitzer Prize-winner Schiff (for *Vladimir Nabokov*) eloquently adds to our understanding of Benjamin Franklin with a graceful, sly and smart look at his seven-year sojourn in France in his quasi-secret quest to secure American independence by procuring an alliance with the French. Drawing on newly available sources, Schiff brilliantly chronicles the international intrigues and the political backbiting that surrounded Franklin during his mission. "A master of the oblique approach, a dabbler in shades of gray," she writes, "Franklin was a natural diplomat, genial and ruthless." She deftly recreates the glittering and gossipy late 18th-century Paris in which Franklin moved, and she brings to life such enigmatic French leaders as Jacques-Donatien Chaumont, Franklin's closest adviser and chief supplier of American aid, and Charles Vergennes, the French minister of foreign affairs, who helped Franklin write the French-American Alliance of 1778. Franklin also negotiated the peace of 1783 that led not only to the independence of the colonies from Britain but also to a bond between France and America that, Schiff says, lasted until WWII. Schiff's sure-handed historical research and her majestic prose offer glimpses into a little-explored chapter

of Franklin's life and American history. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

not very readable--too convoluted

Interesting book worth your time for a deeper understanding of relationships involved.

A perfect example of how an author's personal style can destroy a very interesting book. With tiresome convoluted sentences', and glib and painfully clever writing. It reads like it was written by a very erudite French courtesan of the era. I stuck with it for 100 pages. But this book is just unreadable. It's really a shame because the content is great.

I adore Stacy Schiff -- and getting her books, "pre-loved", from special booksellers, makes it possible to read her books in faraway Philippines, without breaking the bank. The book (from Daily Deals) was crisp and altogether all but perfect. As for Ms. Schiff, everything she writes is just as fabulous.

Great read, great details written in an entertaining fashion.

Purchased as a gift for a Frenchman, who loves USA!

Quite good, esp. for Franklinophiles.

Great read

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